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REACH OUT TO YOUR STUDENTS USING MYSPACE AND FACEBOOK

by Vincci Kwong



INTRODUCTION

In the past, academic libraries posted flyers around campus to promote library events. With the increasing popularity of e-mail, sending out event information to students through campus e-mail seems to be a better option. However, do students pay attention to their campus e-mail?

According to a survey conducted by Eszter Hargittai, an assistant professor of communications studies and sociology at Northwestern University, students often ignore messages coming from their colleges as they consider them a form of spam (Carnevale, 2006). If students are not using campus e-mail to keep up with their friends and classmates, how do they communicate with each other? The answer is that they instead use MySpace and Facebook. Both MySpace and Facebook are social networking websites that provide personalized and interactive services based on users' interest and activities on the Web. Each of them features the opportunity to meet friends through networking and services like blogs, photos, and interest-based events and groups, etc. According to the 2006 Anderson Analytics GenX2Z Annual College Brand Survey, MySpace and Facebook ranked as the top two websites among college students (Weinbery, 2006). Comparing with 2005, MySpace had a 258% increase for the number of visits, while Facebook received a 41% increase for the number of visits (Weinbery, 2006). With an increasing number of students using MySpace and Facebook, many libraries around the country started to experiment with MySpace and Facebook. In May 2006, Franklin D. Schurz Library at Indiana University South Bend set up accounts in both MySpace and Facebook. This article will discuss how the Schurz Library set up an effective profile and utilized different features within MySpace and Facebook to promote itself to students.

MYSPACE ([HTTP://WWW.MYSPACE.COM/](http://www.myspace.com/))

Signing up for a MySpace account is really simple: click on the "Sign Up!" button on the MySpace homepage, fill out a few demographic questions, enter your verification code, and within a few seconds, your

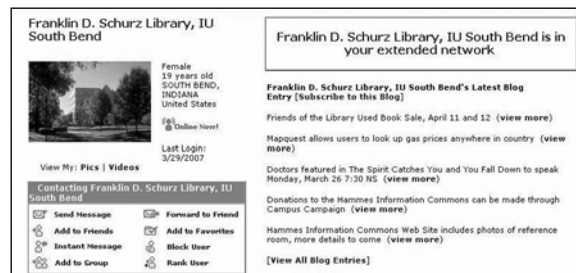
account has been set up. Before you start to work on anything, remember to change the direct link to your profile and your blog that MySpace assigned to you, to one that can be memorized easily. There are many features within MySpace, some of which include music, comedy, classifieds, etc. In the sections below, only features being utilized by the Schurz Library for promotion will be discussed.

Profile

The profile section is divided into eight different sections which include: Interests & Personality; Name; Basic Information; Background & Lifestyle; Schools; Companies; Networking; and Song & Video on Profile. The Interests & Personality section is where users provide information about themselves. In this section, users are allowed to use HTML/DHTML and CSS in any text field to customize their profile. By applying CSS together with HTML/DHTML in the text field, users will be able to create a unique background and change the arrangement of different objects in their profile. Users with advanced programming skills may want to increase the attractiveness of their profile by adding interesting interactive functions, like a pop-up window or mouse over effects through the use of Javascript, but unfortunately the use of Javascript is not allowed in MySpace.

Interests & Personality

- i. About Me: Unlike many other libraries that put their history in this field, we at the Schurz Library came up with a brief description about ourselves. We then listed our regular (Fall and Spring) operating hours. In order to provide a way for students to contact us, we also listed our reference desk phone



Franklin D. Schurz Library, IU South Bend MySpace site

number, e-mail, IM (Instant Messaging), and mailing addresses. We also included the library website's URL for those who would like to learn more about us.

- ii. I'd Like to Meet: What a library enters here depends on the group of users that the library would like to reach. At Schurz Library, we would like to meet undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, staff, alumni, community members, and anyone else who wants to make friends with us.
- iii. Interests: This may differ depending on the goals of each individual library. As an academic library, our primary interest is research. Other than that, we are also interested in reading, learning, teaching, gaming, volunteering, computer, and customer service.
- iv. Music & Movies: Following a brief description about our holdings of both audio and visual materials is a link to our online catalog (IUCAT). Since searching for audio and visual materials requires a special searching technique, we also provide instruction on how to perform this specific type of search.
- v. Books: Similar to Music and Movies, here we provide a link to our online catalog (IUCAT). However, instead of providing instruction on how to perform a basic search, we listed two additional URLs: first, a URL to our new book title page which enables patrons to check out new materials purchased by the library; second, a URL to our Suggestion to Purchase Form which enables patrons to submit a request to purchase material to be added to the library electronically.

Name

When you changed the direct link to your profile and your blog, that unique name you chose also became your unique username and screen name for instant messaging. The unique name is permanent and cannot be changed. However, you can change your display name, which will appear on MySpace for everyone to see.

Basic Information

There are ten demographic questions in this section. While many libraries put the date when their library was established as their date of birth, we decided to use the birthday of a colleague. We considered the fact that students usually search for friends within their age group, we picked 1987 as our year of birth.

Schools

Indiana University South Bend was added. We then included all degree programs offered on our campus as our major. For the section titled "Current Courses," we

included two courses that are currently taught by librarians. All these increase our exposure to students when they look for friends in their field or in their courses.

Photos

The photo section provides a place for users to share photos with friends and other MySpace members. According to the photo policy of MySpace, photos may not contain nudity, sexually explicit content, violent or offensive materials, or copyrighted images (Photo Policy, n.d.). When we first set up our account, the only picture we uploaded was a picture of our library building, which served as our profile image. A few weeks later, we decided to utilize the photo feature as a public relations tool. Every two months, three new library displays are set up in our lobby. Students who stopped by the library will have had a chance to take a look at them, but not the students who did not visit us. As a result, we took digital photos of the displays and uploaded them to MySpace. By uploading the display photos, we hope to catch students' attention and get them to stop by the library to check out the displays in person. When we first started uploading, MySpace limited the number of photos a user could upload to 12 images. In order to reserve space for previous display photos, only one photo for each new display would be uploaded. Recently, MySpace raised the maximum number of photos able to be uploaded to 300 images. This change will enable us to increase the number of photos to be uploaded in the future. As a default, the photos you uploaded will be viewable by everyone, but you have an option to change the setting so that they can be viewed by yourself only. One drawback when using the photo feature is that you cannot organize your photos into different albums, since the album feature is not supported.

Below are some tips when uploading photos to MySpace:

- Photos need to be in GIF or JPG formats.
- File size is limited to 600K. If your photo is larger than 600K, you will need to resize it using image-editing software like Photoshop, IrfanView, GIMP, etc.
- You can upload 300 photos at maximum.
- Use simple and short filenames for ease of retrieval.

Events

Each year, our library organizes at least two library events for students, faculty, staff, and community users. In addition to posting flyers and publishing event information in the library newsletter and on the library's website, we now are able to spread the news through the MySpace Events page. Creating an event

includes two simple steps: it requires you to fill out your desired event information and then invite friends to join. To invite friends to your events, you can select friends from your friends' lists and add them to your invitation list. After you have sent out the invitations, you can check whether your friends have viewed the event invitation and whether they have decided to attend or not. Since people can change their mind at the last minute, the information may better serve as an estimate instead of the actual number of attendees.

Blog

The blog is a good place to post library news. It has a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) text editor, so even people without any Web publishing skills can post information to the blog easily. The WYSIWYG editor not only supports basic editing tools, but also allows users to add emotional icons to their messages. The advanced setting is also available for users to further customize the display and layout of their blog. Lastly, blog statistics are also available. You can view the number of users' posts and comments, as well as the number of people who have viewed your blog. Since Schurz Library already has our own blog, each time we post a new item in our blog, we also need to copy and paste these same items into our MySpace blog.

Calendar

The Calendar feature is mainly used to announce special library hours and upcoming library events.

Search/Browse for Friends

Once you've set up your profile, the next step is to let students know of your presence. MySpace provides two different ways for users to look for friends: search and browse. For us, the search function works better. We type in "Indiana University South Bend" in Classmate Finder, and then we perform an age range search. In order to add a friend, you need to go to his or her profile and click on the "Add Me" button. As users can change their display names whenever they want, you may find that when you are trying to add a friend, MySpace will tell you that he or she was already a friend of yours if you don't keep track of requests for friends that you sent.

FACEBOOK ([HTTP://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/](http://www.facebook.com/))

When Facebook was first launched, only college students with a valid education-oriented e-mail were allowed to sign up (Greenwell & Kraemer, 2006). Since then, it has expanded to high school students who have a referral from a college student. And now it has expanded even further – everyone can register for an account. The Schurz Library signed up for a Facebook account in May 2006. However, the account was closed by Facebook in October 2006 due to a violation of

Terms of Agreement. According to Facebook, profiles must be created for individuals only. Organizational profiles, which include the one set up by Schurz Library, are not allowed according to Facebook's Terms of Agreement. As I was the one who initiated the Facebook outreach project, I followed Facebook's suggestion and signed up for an individual account. After I got my account set up, I created a Schurz Library group using the "My Group" feature. However, after exploring the "My Group" feature, I found out that its functionality is limited and thus could not really be compared to the features of a personal account. So I decided to continue our effort to reach our students through my personal Facebook account in addition to the Schurz Library group. In the sections below, I will demonstrate how to utilize different features of a personal account within Facebook to promote the library.

My Profile

There are seven subsections within My Profile: Basic, Contact, Personal, Education, Work, Courses, and Pictures. Since it is a personal account, I filled in my contact information, education, interests, etc. As to courses, instead of adding in any courses that I would currently be taking, I added in courses that I currently teach. I didn't upload any pictures during the first few weeks after I set up my profile, but then some students who came across my profile suggested that I should add a picture of myself. I followed their advice and added one.

My Photos

Just like MySpace, Facebook has a place where you can share photos with your friends. However, unlike MySpace, not only can you upload an unlimited number of photos, but you may set up individual albums of photos. The ability to set up an individual album is great, because you can then organize your photos in meaningful ways, such as categories, events, etc. For example, I set up a photo album for displays in June, another album for displays in December, and have an additional album dedicated to library events. Once you have created an album, you can then upload photos. Though it is true that you can upload an unlimited number of photos in Facebook, each user can only upload 60 photos for each album. The process of uploading photos is very user-friendly. Just check the boxes for the thumbnails of photos that you want to upload, then click on the "upload" button. Different options are available when uploading photos; the ability to enter captions and tag people are two such options. While MySpace only supports GIF and JPG image format, Facebook also supports the PNG format. In addition, there is no need to resize your photos as Facebook will automatically do it during the uploading process.

My Shares

This is a new feature that Facebook has recently launched. It allows users to share content within Facebook or anywhere else on the Internet with their Facebook friends. When I visited some online reference sources or websites which I thought would be useful for the students, I shared it with my Facebook friends. To share content within Facebook, you can use the "Share" button. To share resources on the Internet, you can type the URL into the "Share a Link" box under the My Shares section. To make sharing easier, Facebook offers a "Share on Facebook" button, which you can drag to your bookmarks toolbar. This enables you to quickly share any webpage with your friends, even when you are not on Facebook.

My Notes

The function this section serves is blogging. For some reason, Facebook called it My Notes instead of My Blog. There are two ways to get content into My Notes. The first one is write a new note by manually typing up content. Unlike MySpace which offers a WYSIWYG text editor, Facebook only offers a simple text area for user to input text. In addition, HTML and CSS are not supported. On the other hand, you can upload pictures and tag them together with your notes. If your library has already established a blog like we have, you can get its content imported to My Notes quickly and easily. To do so, select "Import a blog" link on the My Notes page, then enter the URL of your blog into the textbox and click on "Save Settings." Previous entries of your blog will then be in place. Any future entry to your blog will then automatically post in My Notes. Lastly, just like many other blogging services, an RSS feed is supported for your Notes. RSS, which stands for Really Simple Syndication, enables information providers to feed news information to subscribers (Finkelstein, 2005). Users who subscribed to your RSS feed will be notified through their new readers/aggregators when new content is added to your Notes.

My Groups

As mentioned above, users can set up groups in Facebook. After I completed my personal profile, I set up a Schurz Library group. The features offered to groups are limited and below are some of my findings.

1. **Recent News:** A regular textbox is provided for users to type in news items. There is no mention of a maximum number of characters that are allowed in the textbox. However, it is not comparable with My Notes at all. When you add a new item in Recent News, no automatic date and time stamp will be added. Also, the function which allows users to comment on the news item is missing. Besides, you will not be able to share the news item with others using the "My Shares" feature.

2. **Photos:** Even though you can upload, caption, and tag photos just like the personal account, you cannot create individual albums to organize photos.
3. **The Walls:** This is a forum for your friends to post comments or insights about you. It seems to be the only way to communicate with members in the group, except by mass mailing. No other feature is available for the group owner to make announcements and post information to the group members.

My Events

This section is usually used to post information related to parties, baby showers, open houses, etc. For our library it serves a great purpose: a place to post library events information. To create an event, you need to fill in basic event information like date, time, place, etc. Options are also available to set up access in order to control who can view the event information. To set an event to "open" means anyone can view the event information, people can add themselves to the guest list and invite others to the event. To set an event to "closed" means anyone can see the event time and description but not location, guest list, etc. Also, people cannot add themselves to the guest list; only you can do so. To set an event to "secret" means the event will not appear in search results, only people you invited can view the event information. Since our library welcomes community members to join all library events, I always set it to open. Once all the event information is in place, you have an option to upload pictures related to the events. A digital copy of posters or flyers may be a good idea for visual appeal. The last step is to add people to your guest list. Since Facebook doesn't provide a function to invite all of your friends at one time, you will need to add friends to the guest list one by one, which is quite time consuming.

My Messages

This is an e-mailing tool - another way that you can keep contact with your friends. However, unlike the messages feature in My Groups, it does not support mass mailing.

My Privacy

Unlike MySpace, which does not give users much control over who can and cannot view their profile, Facebook gives users different levels of control for their profile. By default, everyone from your primary network - in my case, everyone from Indiana University South Bend - is allowed to view my profile and contact information. However, you have the option to restrict information on your profile so that it may be viewed only by a specific group. Not only can you block a group from viewing your profile, you can also block individuals. You can do this by adding that person to the Limited Profile List. In the case that you encounter a

disturbing or troublesome user, you can even block that user further by adding that person to the Block List so that person will not be able to search for you, see your profile, or contact you on Facebook.

Search/Browse for Friends

Searching and browsing are the two ways to look up friends in Facebook. There are four different types of searches: Basic, Classmate, Coworker, and Advanced Search. When performing an advanced search, you can perform a search within your networks and friends or within your primary network. Within the advanced search, the ability to search by class year is the most helpful for us. We started with students in their freshman year and continue to upper level students. To add a friend, click on "Add to Friends." Once you have submitted the request to add a friend, it becomes a pending request until the person confirms the request. If you continue to add friends, you may reach the maximum number of requests allowed. In that case, you will need to wait until people respond to your pending friend requests before you can add additional friends.

To Sum Up

Currently, Indiana University South Bend's Schurz Library has 223 friends at MySpace. It has 174 members in the Schurz Library group, and it has 375 friends associated with my personal account in Facebook. In addition, more than 1,100 people have viewed our MySpace profile and nearly 700 have read our MySpace blog about library news. Partially due to the publicity of the Schurz Library Speaker Series on both websites, attendance at last year's library speaker event was substantially higher than in the past. Our effort seems to be successful, which is very encouraging. As MySpace and Facebook continue to add new services, we investigate new features that will enable us to promote our library and its services to students, faculty, staff, and the community beyond.

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Vincci Kwong received her M.L.S. degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May 2005 and started her first professional position as the Head of Web Services at Schurz Library, Indiana University South Bend in August 2005. Schurz Library is a medium-sized college library with 11 full-time librarians. Her primary job responsibility includes reference service, library instruction, and Web development. Currently, Kwong is a member of several professional organizations, including ALA, Indiana Library Federation, and the Chinese American Librarians Association.

